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ABSTRACT

There are many analogies between the teaching of music and the teaching of foreign languages. First, the subjects themselves are similar: both are associated with culture, both involve a notational system, both represent a means of communication, and so on. The learning processes associated with music and language are similar, as well. Both are characterized by high degree of transfer of training, the need for a long study period before mastery is achieved, and the need for continuous utilization to avoid attrition. Teaching language is much like teaching music: the teacher must have a practitioner's level of skill, there is a body of great art to be drawn upon for teaching material, and differences between languages in terms of ease and marketability are analagous to differences between musical instruments. The language teacher would do well to follow the example of the music teacher, since the latter has learned the lessons of publicity, early initial instruction, dealing with limited resources, and professional cooperation. (JB)

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SUCCESSFUL FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROGRAMS: STRIKE UP THE BAND BEFORE THEY DRUM US OUT OF TOWN*

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Introduction

Recently I've been having thoughts about parallels between our profession, that of foreign language teaching, and another important--and often embattled--profession: that of the music educators. These parallels, it seems to me, fall nicely into three categories:

a. Similarities between language and music.

b. Similarities between learning music and learning a foreign language.

c. Similarities between teaching music and teaching a foreign language.

I would like to examine each of these three categories in turn, and then see if perhaps from them we might be able to derive some music lessons for language teachers.

Let me begin by suggesting that there are many <u>similarities between language and music</u>.

1. Both language and music are natural outgrowths of their culture. Few things are more typical of a culture than its language or its music. We grow up with our language, and we grow up with our music. A group of my friends--who grew up in the '50's and '60's--and I occasionally pass some pleasant hours, for example, thinking up titles and first lines of songs that came out of our era. We share something--and the music of that era calls forth for us vivid images of language, dress, and dates that might otherwise be forgotten. Something that is not <u>our</u> music is, however, not favored with these instantly recognizable, pleasantly familiar associations; indeed, something that is not our music may be instantly suspect, something we regard as "wierd," or that we may want to have nothing to do with. Is not language much the same? Consider dialects of your native language. Don't some sound familiar and friendly, while others conjure up negative images, at least for a moment?

2. While exceptional skill may be admired in both language and music, the more common case is that both are taken for granted. We hardly take any notice, for example, of the considerable amount of talent that goes into putting together even the simplest jingle that we hear on radio or television. Likewise, most monolingual Americans take it for granted that when we hear leaders in politics, science and

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FL 012 796

the arts from all over the world being interviewed on television, they will speak English. To be sure, there are occasionally selected categories of people--famous composers, let us say, or performing artists--and certain environments (e.g., the band's halftime show at the football game) in which music and those associated with it do, in fact, come into their own and are admired. Likewise in language, we recognize famous authors, or are vastly relieved in a foreign country when someone comes along who can help us out of a difficulty by speaking the right combination of languages. But these are exceptional cases, not the rule.

3. Both language and music are content-free; they are both adaptable to a wide veriety of styles and uses. Consider, for example, in music: marches, symphonies, easy listening, top forty, country, blues, chamber music, punk rock, jazz, folk music, acid rock, and so on. And in language, we have the vastly different styles and purposes of poetry, short stories, instructional manuals, novels, advertising, luncheon speeches, newspapers, history texts, and so on.

4. Both language and music are constantly evolving and changing. This is true not only of the languages themselves, but also of the ways they carry their message. Latin, as we all know, evolved into Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese and Romanian. Likewise our family of bowed instruments--the violin, viola, cello, and bass viol--all seem to have evolved from a 9th Century central Asian instrument. Certain instruments and styles become associated with certain periods in history, certain cultures, or even certain social classes. The same can be said of language.

5. In both language and music there is a notational system that is an abstract, arbitrary visual medium for representing the "true essence,"--the auditory phenomenon--which is speech or melody. And learning to read that notational system--be it music or language--and smoothly transform what has been read back into the acoustic medium is a matter of definite challenge, in each case.

6. Both language and music represent a means of communication. The composer communicates through performers to an audience, as does the playwright. And, of course, there is spontaneous communication that occurs between speakers of language, just as there is spontaneous communication between musicians in a jam session.

If there are so many obvious parallels between music and language, then it should not be surprising that there might also be <u>similarities between learning music and learning language</u>. Here are some examples that have occured to me:

1. Both skills--excluding for the moment child language acquisition--develop similarly, with effort, and slowly over time. No one expects to play piano beautifully after two years of lessons, and no one can expect to speak Spanish fluently given a similar amount of typical classroom study. (We might even suspect that if people really

appreciated the true complexity of the task of learning to play an instrument or learning to speak a second language, no one would start either!)

2. Both require almost daily practice and challenges of increasing difficulty if the learner is going to become really proficient in their use.

3. Both require that they be utilized regularly in order to maintain acquired skills at a high level. It's really true: we lose what we don't use. (I've noticed in each, however, what I think is a threshhold phenomenon: once one has learned to speak Hebrew fluently, or once having learned to play trumpet well, one never entirely loses the skill--but it does decay!)

4. In both language and music there's a high degree of positive transfer of training that a learner can use to his or her great advantage. Having learned to play the flute as a child, for example, I subsequently in my teens had a much easier time learning to play guitar (which is clearly from a completely different family of instruments; the actual playing of guitar and flute have nothing in common)--because I already knew a lot about how music worked--than did a number of other people who started guitar lessons with me. Likewise, having taken Spanish and German in high school, I had very little trouble with Russian (which, it could be argued, is not much closer to Spanish than guitar is to flute) when I started it in college--because I already was familiar with language concepts of, for example, gender, case, number, and tricky verb usage.

5. In learning either language or music, imitation and learning by example usually play a key role for beginners: the importance of a good model is very real whether we talk about bassoon or Bengali. There is also a very real role, however, to be played by conscious learning and the application of certain rules and principles. Also, feedback from a proficient speaker of the language (or player of the instrument) is very crucial to the learning sequence. One can't do it all alone, from a book.

6. People may choose to learn either music or foreign language for a variety of reasons: the motivation may be from parents, peers, personal interest, or the desire to use the skill in some way.

7. In learning either language or music, it is extremely important that the learner achieve success and satisfaction in all three modes of learning: cognitive (he has to know what he's doing), affective (he has to like what he's doing) and psychomotor (provided he's actually going to develop one of the productive skills, that is).

Given the similarities outlined already, it might follow that there ought to be <u>some similarities between teaching music and teaching language</u>.

1. We've already mentioned one: the attainment of real proficiency is a gradual and long-term prospect, and people inevitably make errors along the way. With music, people expect to have their children start young and suffer through years of cacophonous, error-filled practice at home (5, 8, or 10 years would not be unusual) before the children develop real skill. Why then do parents and the public seem to expect miracles from high school German study of two or three years? If parents or the school music teacher got as upset about errors made by the players in the student orchestra as some language teachers do about errors in their classrooms, how long would the music teacher have an orchestra, a job, or an ulcer-free stomach?

2. Both language and music teachers are interested in imparting to their clientele learning in all three domains: knowledge, appreciation, and skill (cognitive, affective, and psychomotor). As a result of that, much in our methodologies can be similar:

--- The first time I ever used backward buildup--we didn't call it that, but that's what it was--was to master certain difficult runs on the flute.

--- Both language and music require a good balance between skill-getting and skill-using activities: music teachers prescribe scales, language teachers prescribe certain kinds of drills. Both kinds of teachers, however, must soon give their students a chance to use what they've learned or student interest will drop off drastically. In music they have the students play pieces, sometimes alone, sometimes in groups (I vividly recall the first time I played in a band!) In language, we also have to give the students chances to communicate with one another, or better yet, with native speakers (I also vividly recall the first time I fulfilled a need in Mexico using Spanish!)

--- While neither language nor music teachers should take it upon themselves to be prescriptive about student goals (even though some of us may feel that the ultimate is to play Tchaikowskiy or read Dostoevskiy), we can utilize the masterworks of our field (if not in the original, at least in adapted form) for our students. (I am somewhat perplexed by the chronic debate--now in a quiescent stage, it would appear--about whether using adaptations for our students to read is acceptable. I cannot imagine what my musical education would have been like had my band leaders insisted that I play no Sousa at all until I could handle the intricate trills and flourishes that he wrote for piccolo in, for example, "The Stars And Stripes Forever.")

--- While large group instruction may be mandated in school music programs by costs, practicality, and scheduling, anyone who wants to become really proficient on his instrument will unquestionably have to find the time and money for

supplementary 1:1 music lessons on the outside; he or she will also have to do the outside practice that those tutorial music lessons imply. Similarly, the classroom is not likely to provide sufficient language-learning and language-use opportunities for the serious language student: anyone who wants to become really proficient in a foreign language will spend a lot of extra time outside of class, perhaps with a friend who is a native speaker, or corresponding with a pen-pal, or listening to short-wave radio broadcasts, or going to foreign movies, or maybe even devoting significant time and money to travel and study abroad.

3. In very few fields other than language and music is the teacher likely to be called upon to demonstrate a practitioner's level of skill in his specialty. History teachers aren't required to "demonstrate" their history, English teachers aren't expected to be publishing novelists, and biology and chemistry teachers aren't asked to analyze new forms of life or create new substances. But woe to the music teacher who can't play his or her instrument well, and pity the language teacher who can't converse with a visiting native from the target country.

4. In very few other fields is the dividing line between the "initiated" and the "uninitiated" quite so sharp. This tends, almost from the very start, to make our two fields somewhat unapproachable, i.e., some people won't even <u>try</u> to learn or participate (music teachers and church choir directors probably hear, "Me, sing? I can't carry a tune in a bucket," just about as often as language teachers hear, "Me, take French? I have enough trouble with English!")

5. In both fields there is a recognized--though perhaps poorly researched--quality among students called "aptitude." In music, they accept this; in language we often seem to want to fight it. We seem to feel that there is something undemocratic about it, or that there's something wrong with our students, our methods, our books, or us if we can't move all of our students along at about the same rate to a certain level of proficiency.

6. Some instruments are more difficult to learn than others, taking longer to make progress on (oboe is considered harder, for example, than clarinet). So, too, with language: as one who has studied and taught a number of them, I cannot in good conscience tell potential students that Russian is no harder than Spanish. The fact of the matter is--and in this I will be backed up by data from the government language schools--that it takes twice as long to go from proficiency level 0 to proficiency level 3 in Russian as it does in French or Spanish. We must not, therefore, expect our students to attain the same proficiency levels in all languages after one semester, say, of language study.

7. Some languages, like some instruments, have broader mass appeal than others. There are more violinists, trumpeters and

clarinetists than there are oboists, violists or french horn players, for example. Likewise, there are (and probably always will be) more students of French and Spanish in this country than there will be of Russian or Japanese.

8. The employment potential in some languages (and for some instruments) is greater than it is in others. Just as every orchestra needs more violinists than contrabassoonists, so most American government agencies and businesses are likely to need more speakers of Spanish, French or German than speakers of Arabic, Russian, or Indonesian. (On the other hand, when a speaker of Arabic, Russian, or Indonesian is needed, he or she may be able to command a premium . . . as might contrabassoonists.)

9. Our educational system has come up with strikingly similar categories for developing professionals in both fields:

Music theory	Linguistics
Music history, musicology	Literature
Music education	Foreign language education

(There is, perhaps, one unfortunate exception. In music, someone interested primarily in developing and using his or her musical talent can pursue a degree in applied music or music performance. In language, however, many of our colleagues disdain those with such practical orientations, preferring to exclude the development of pure language-use skills from the academic scene.)

What can we learn from this elaborate, and perhaps in places overdrawn, parallel between our field and that of our counterparts in music? Here are some of my thoughts on some music lessons for language teachers:

1. The music profession and the public openly recognize the importance of the availability of long learning sequences if true proficiency is to be developed. This implies starting music at an early age, with heavy recruitment and cadet programs in feeder schools. We in language should push for no less, and we should do so vigorously.

2. The music people know the importance of going public. The band show at halftime garners support for music programs in general, support that spills over into chorus and orchestra programs. While the music people may have an unfair advantage--theirs is, after all, a performance medium--there are lots of things we can do to put us in the public eye: sponsor contests (and make sure the winners get a lot of publicity) present plays, organize food and culture fairs, or a United Nations festival; perhaps let advanced students organize themselves to provide a variety of voluntary language services such as afternoon lessons in the target language for elementary school children or in retirement centers, or tutoring recent arrivals from

abroad in English, or staffing a multilingual information booth at the airport or in a hotel when international visitors are expected at a conference. (Russian Sampler Lessons on our campus during registration week regulary draw over 100 people.)

3. We must strive not to be prescriptive about learners' goals either in terms of "why" or "how far." We need, as the music teachers seem to have, a belief in the intrinsic worth of what we're teaching. This implies that if skill-using is what most turns our students on--as opposed, let us say, to the study of literature--then we need to accept and nourish that interest; there's room in the language world for all kinds of people. We college people, especially, must come down from the clouds, abandon the major-minor mania, and enthusiastically embrace every chance we have to offer service courses.

4. While career education is important, and while foreign language skill does indeed have marketable value (as does musical skill) we, just like the music teachers, must convince the public that language study need not lead to a vocationally usable level of skill in the language to have been valuable. How often, for example, does a language teacher hear the refrain--sometimes even from colleagues who are supposed to be educators--"I took two years of Spanish in high school and don't remember a thing." (My usual response is something like, "Well, I took a year of algebra and a year of geometry in high school, and because I haven't needed or tried to use either one since then, I don't remember much about <u>them</u>, either.") We must counter the implied feeling that those two <u>years</u> of Spanish--or whatever--study were wasted.

5. Music teachers have developed ways to handle large classes with mixed levels of proficiency, and students in those classes accept these mixed proficiency levels among their peers. The first chair trombonist, for example, can probably play circles around the 5th chair player, but that does not mean that they both can't play in the same band, that the first chair cannot help the 5th chair learn, nor that the 5th chair really holds the first chair back. Perhaps, instead of fighting combined 3d and 4th (or 4th and 5th) year language classes, we should welcome them and develop strategies for making them effective learning environments for our students.

6. Finally, it seems to me that music teachers are more unified and professional than we are. Music Educators National Conference (MENC), for example, has 63,000 members nationally; ACTFL (and I submit that there are probably more language teachers employed in schools than music teachers) has only about 9,000. Other signs of unity among music teachers:

--- Trumpet teachers don't squabble with violin teachers over students; any music student is considered a credit to the whole music program (but can we truly say that German teachers don't sometimes resent the dominance of Spanish in the curriculum?)

--- Oboe specialists don't expect to find oboe instruction programs in elementary schools, but rather are generally content to start beginning oboists at the secondary school level from among proficient flutists and clarinetists. And if a youngster chooses to drop flute for oboe, the flute teachers may feel sorry that they've lost a talented student, but generally they recognize that the student is still in music and has made a choice that appeals to him. Similarly, I as a Russian teacher cannot realistically expect to see school systems with FLES include Russian as an equal partner with Spanish and French; I would hope, however, that Spanish and French teachers would not oppose the offering of FLEX programs (e.g., 9 weeks each of Spanish, French, German, Russian, or of Spanish, Latin, Hebrew, and Japanese, in a sixth grade or middle school). Likewise I would also hope that Spanish and French teachers would not resist the introduction of Russian in secondary school nor try to dissuade a talented third-year French student from changing over to Chinese if that's his expressed interest and he has the opportunity to do so.

--- College band directors recognize the importance of building and maintaining good relations with music programs in nearby feeder schools, elementary through secondary. They go out of their way, often, to assist secondary school music programs with contests, invitations to visit campus, organizing clinics, lending music, visiting the schools, and so on. Secondary school music teachers, for their part, recognize that such school-college collegiality helps them build their own programs; hence they help it along. Should we in the foreign language field do any less?

Conclusion

We have come a long way over the last 20 years as a profession that has begun to take a realistic look at itself. Especially during the last ten years, however, it may have seemed that we were in danger because, perhaps, our field had seemed too esoteric, too impractical, or we'd seemed too elitist, or whatever. I believe our profession is now waking up to the fact that none of those adjectives can nor should be applied to us. I think we must, however, keep our music colleagues in mind, along with our own hopes and wishes for the students in our foreign language classes. We are a group of professionals who teach both a skill and one of the most challenging of academic subject matters. We have no reason to feel beleaguered unless we allow it to happen. Let's strike up the band on our own behalf!